Kushwaha (Koiri) Caste Status in Nepal

Overview

The Kushwaha (also known as Koiri) community is a Terai/Madhesi caste group found across Nepal's southern plains, concentrated in Madhesh Pradesh, Koshi Pradesh, and Lumbini Pradesh. According to Nepal's 2021 National Population and Housing Census, Kushwaha numbered 355,707 people, or 1.22% of the national population (up from 306,393 / 1.16% in the 2011 census), making it the 18th largest recorded caste/ethnicity in the country. **Kushwaha (Koiri) is an upper caste living in** the Terai . The Kushwaha community constitutes about 1.22% of the population of Nepal. Its number is more than 355,000. This community mainly lives in the districts of Madhesh Pradesh , Koshi Pradesh , Lumbini Pradesh and is considered an important community in Madhesh society. [3] Their main ancestral occupation is agriculture and land ownership. But now they are in every profession, business, education, civil service, army etc., they are an influential and well-organized powerful caste compared to other Madhesh castes. They are very hardworking. The Kushwaha community belongs to the Vaishya class of the Madhesh upper caste [4] , but many also claim to have the Kshatriya status. Although their ancestors were vegetarians, this is currently changing. The traditionally prevalent surname of this community is Mahato. Surnames used by the Kushwaha/Koiri community in Nepal include Mahato, Singh, Kushwaha, Mehta, Maurya, Murao, Bhagat, Sinha, and Verma etc. Some Kushwaha organizations in Nepal claim that the Kushwaha (Koiri) community in Nepal has a population of over one million. If this number is accepted, it is equivalent to about 3.4% of the total population of Nepal.

Not Classified as OBC in Nepal

Unlike in India, where Kushwaha/Koiri is officially listed as an Other Backward Class (OBC) by the National Commission for Backward Classes, Nepal does not use an India-style OBC classification system at all. Within Nepal's own caste framework, the Kushwaha (Koiri) community is generally treated as part of the Madheshi "Upper" caste sub-category, alongside groups such as Terai/Maithil Brahmins, Rajput, Kayastha, according to the 2021 census classification used on Wikipedia's "Ethnic groups in Nepal" article. The community is traditionally linked to land ownership and agriculture, is placed in the Vaishya varna, and many members additionally assert Kshatriya status.

This upper/dominant status is echoed in civil-service representation data cited on the same article: pre-2015 studies found Kushwaha representation in Nepal's civil service running at roughly 3.2 times their population share — the fourth-highest ratio of any caste group in the country, behind Rajput (5.6x), Maithili Brahmin (4.2x), and one other group. Nepal's own-language (Nepali) Wikipedia entry for कोइरी ("Koiri") likewise describes the community as economically and politically an upper-caste, landowning group, and as one of the major, unified Madhesi castes; it notes that a landless or poor Koiri is rarely seen in Nepal. The Nepali-language "Nepal ka Jatiharu" (Castes of Nepal) article separately groups Maithili Brahmin, Yadav, Rajput, Kushwaha, together under "Terai Upper Status" (तराई हैसियत), describing them as the upper castes of the Madhesi sub-group.

Caste classification in Nepal remains complex and, at points, actively contested. Nepal's reservation/inclusion categories are organized around broader groupings — Adivasi/Janajati, Khas-Arya, Madhesi (including Madhesi Dalit), and Muslim — rather than a direct OBC list, and government bodies such as the Madhesi Commission have periodically revised which groups count as "Madhesi" (for example, removing Tharu and Muslim communities from that list in 2022). Self-identification, regional context, and social-mobility movements (Sanskritization, political organizing) continue to shape how a given caste's status is perceived and asserted, so the summary above reflects the general pattern found in these sources rather than a single, uncontested legal ruling.

Upper Madhesi Castes in Nepal

Nepal's Madhesi caste hierarchy in the Terai broadly follows the classical four-varna model (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra), and per Wikipedia's "Caste system in Nepal" article, the Central Bureau of Statistics recorded 43 caste-origin Hindu groups within the Madhesh in 2001. Groups generally treated as upper or dominant Madhesi castes include:

- Terai/Maithil Brahmins – priestly class
  (note: the 1854 Muluki Ain legal code recognized a Terai/"Desi" Brahmin category but made no explicit mention of a Terai Kshatriya group, an omission flagged in the Wikipedia "Caste system in Nepal" article)
- Kushwaha (Koiri) – Vaishya-status, land-owning agricultural castes; several of these communities also assert Kshatriya descent

By contrast, Madhesi Dalit groups — such as Chamar, Musahar, Dushad/Paswan, Tatma, Khatwe, and Dom — sit at the bottom of this hierarchy and are recognized separately under Nepal's constitutional Dalit protections.

Sources

Wikipedia: “Ethnic groups in Nepal” (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_groups_in_Nepal)
Wikipedia: “Caste system in Nepal” (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caste_system_in_Nepal)
Nepali Wikipedia: “कोइरी” [Koiri] (ne.wikipedia.org/wiki/कोइरी)
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